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Minutes of the meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Monday, 12 December 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor C D Zosseder

Councillors: P M Brivio
T A Bond
D R Friend
D A Hawkes
M Rose
R S Walkden
P Walker
H M Williams

Also Present: Partnership Director (Civica)
Customer Services Manager (Civica)

Officers: Strategic Director (Corporate and Regulatory)
Strategic Director (Finance and Housing)
Strategic Director (Place and Environment)
Regeneration Delivery Manager
Head of Investment, Growth and Tourism
Head of Commercial Services
Head of Property Assets
Democratic and Corporate Services Manager

48 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S C Manion.

49 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager advised that no notice had been received for the appointment of substitute members.

50 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

51 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2022 were approved as a correct record for signing by the Chairman.

52 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET RELATING TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The decisions of the Cabinet relating to recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting were noted.

53 ISSUES REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY PUBLIC PETITION, COUNCIL, CABINET, OR ANOTHER COMMITTEE

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager advised that there were no issues referred to the Committee by Council, Cabinet or another Committee.

54 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager presented the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions to the Committee for its consideration.

In the absence of any dissent, it was agreed to note the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions.

55 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme to the Committee for its consideration.

Councillor M Rose asked for the inclusion of an item on the in-housing of services to be confirmed in the work programme.

In the absence of any dissent, it was agreed to note the Work Programme.

56 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager advised that no members of the public had registered to speak on items on the agenda to which the public speaking protocol applied.

57 CIVICA CUSTOMER SERVICES

The Partnership Director (Civica) and the Customer Services Manager (Civica) were in attendance to discuss the performance of customer services against the key performance indicators.

Members were informed how the answer time for calls was calculated and how staffing was based on predictive software modelling. Civica dealt with enquiries for 32 services across the 3 East Kent authorities (Canterbury, Dover and Thanet) of which 10 services were specific to Dover. They received 420,000 calls in total of which 130,000 were for Dover District Council.

All staff answering calls for Dover, regardless of where they were based were trained to answer questions on services provided by the Council. Not all enquiries could be resolved by customer services at the first point of contact but wherever possible this was done.

The impact on call answer times through administering the £150 Council Tax Rebate mandated by Government in response to rising energy bills was highlighted as significant pressure on call answer times in May, June and July 2022. As part of this the Council had needed to contact 11,000 residents to obtain their bank details to process the rebate.

It was stated that since August 2022, the customer services call answer time had been on target.

Members raised the following points:

- To express dissatisfaction with the target of 4 minutes for answering calls.
- To enquire about the training provided to customer services staff.
- To raise issues where customer services had not been able to connect Members or the public to the appropriate officer or department.
- To request contact email addresses in the event that Members had issues and needed assistance.
- To enquire as to whether Civica offered apprenticeships. In response it was stated that apprenticeships had been stopped during the pandemic but Civica was looking to restart them again. Civica was a gold employer under the Investors in People standard.
- The need to be smarter in the use of data.

The importance of dealing with customers compassionately when dealing with complex issues was discussed and supported.

Councillor C D Zosseder thanked the attendees from Civica for attending the meeting and answering Members questions.

58 MEMORIAL ITEMS

The Head of Property Assets presented an update on proposals for the future of Memorial Items.

Members were advised that the discretionary service had been suspended due to a number of reasons such as the pandemic, the retirement of the officer responsible for administering it and that the service was failing to meet its costs. The suspension offered the opportunity to initiate a review of the service and redesign a more sustainable service that met resident's needs. It had been hoped that the review would be concluded by now but other factors had delayed completion.

There was support expressed by Members for offering a range of options to residents for memorial items. It was highlighted that residents most commonly asked for memorial benches and the Head of Property Assets advised that this was being looked at but there had been concerns about the on-going maintenance of these benches and the limited number of locations people wanted them to be placed meant that there were often existing benches already located there.

Members were advised that it was expected that the review would be concluded by the end of January 2023.

59 GARDEN WASTE CONTAINERISATION PROJECT

The Head of Commercial Services presented the Garden Waste Containerisation Project report.

Members were informed that the Council's existing garden waste collection service was based on reusable sacks for the containment of the garden waste. The collection crews were at an increased risk of musculoskeletal injuries when residents filled the sacks beyond the maximum permitted weight of 20kg. The report recommended the replacement of the sacks with a wheeled-bin instead to mitigate this risk. The report also contained a number of recommendations in respect of the fees, and revised terms and conditions for the service.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Environment, Councillor N S Kenton, was also in attendance and advised that the size of the replacement bin was being considered. The current standard size bin was 240 litres but there was the option of using one or more smaller 180 litre bins for green waste if the Council wanted. Currently, subscribers to the green waste scheme had 6 x 60 litre bags (a total of 360 litres).

It was noted that there would be no perfect solution to the required changes to the service and that some areas might not be able to utilise the new bins. There were just under 10,000 subscribers currently to the green waste scheme. It was proposed that the first bin would be free.

Members raised the following points:

- Whether the required number of bins could be delivered in time.
- How customers would be advised of the change.
- How many subscribers would be unable to use the green waste service following the introduction of containerisation.
- Whether people joining the scheme in future years would need to purchase their bin or it would be given free to them.
- Whether the increased number of calls generated by such a changeover in April/May would cause problems for Civica who would be dealing with Council Tax enquiries during that period. In response it was stated that the renewal occurred at this point every year and it was not expected that there would be a problem in terms of the volume of calls.

The Head of Commercial Services advised that the manufacturer of the new green waste bins was a large operator and it was anticipated that they would be able to deliver the required number of bins for the start date of the new service. Additionally, new bin lifts would be fitted to the vehicles.

It was not possible to advise Members how many subscribers would be lost because of the change but it was accepted there would be challenges. However, it was expected that people would appreciate the change once they were used to it. Communication would go out to all subscribers in respect of the proposed changes.

In the absence of any dissent, it was agreed to note the report.

60 STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD – QUARTER TWO 2022/23

The Strategic Director (Corporate and Regulatory) presented the Strategic Performance Dashboard – Quarter Two 2022/23. Members were reminded that this was a twelve-month pilot with changes likely between quarters as it developed.

The specific areas of performance that were highlighted were as followed:

- Anti-Social Behaviour – A rise in the number of incidents investigated by Housing Management increased from 61 to 111 over the last quarter, attributed to the vulnerability of many of the Council's tenants and also to greater confidence in reporting incidents.

- Affordable Homes – There were a further 9 affordable homes added to the Council’s housing stock.
- Business Rate Collection – There were a number of factors that had led to the collection rate being below where it was expected, and it was being monitored to see if there was any further deterioration.
- Council Tax Collection – This was currently performing better than expected due to the Energy Rebate Scheme payments being credited to accounts.
- Customer Services – A failure of a council telephony server during the last week of September had meant that staff were unable to access the telephone system. Civica had requested excused performance as a result.
- Waste – There had been a deterioration in performance indicators for missed household waste collections and environmental cleanliness.

Members raised the following points:

- That the increased footfall being recorded for Dover did not seem to match people’s impressions of the number of people visiting the town centre. It was questioned whether the increased footfall had translated into increased spend locally but as this data was held by local businesses, they had to be willing to share it with the Council.
- The importance of local businesses being able to tender for works such as Maison Dieu. Members were advised that this was competitively tendered but it was hoped that local businesses would benefit from sub-contracting arrangements.
- To clarify the difference between litter and detritus.
- The need to improve the void turnaround time.
- To reiterate that the target for call answering by customer services was too long.

In the absence of dissent, it was agreed to note the report.

61 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was moved by Councillor D R Friend, duly seconded by Councillor M Rose and

RESOLVED: That, under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the remainder of the business on the grounds that the items to be considered involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Act.

62 TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION BUDGET DRAWDOWN FOR WORKS IN BENCH STREET, DOVER

The Head of Investment, Growth and Tourism presented the report on the Town Centre Regeneration Budget Drawdown for Works in Bench Street, Dover.

Members welcomed the proposals.

In the absence of dissent, it was agreed to note the report.

The meeting ended at 8.16 pm.